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✠ The Dead ✠



THE DEAD IN CHRIST.

The Dead in Christ :

**A WORD OF CONSOLATION FOR
MOURNERS.**

**BY THE
REV. R. C. LUNDIN BROWN, M.A.,
LATE VICAR OF RHODES, MANCHESTER.**

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“The souls of the righteous are in the Hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seem to die, and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction : but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.”—WISD. iii. 1—5.

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THE DEAD IN CHRIST.

INTRODUCTION.

The Sorrows and the Uses of Bereavement.

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”—*S. Matth. v. 4.*

BEREAVEMENT is one of the most painful, often one of the most crushing forms of adversity. For it is the loss of that which most we value, and it is a loss irreparable till we die. Other losses may be made good, but this one never. Health may be regained, an ill-name lived down, a shattered fortune raised from its ruins. But in vain shall the solitary mourner yearn—

“For the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice which is still ;”

never, never until "the day break and the shadows flee away," shall his eyes behold the cherished form of the loved and lost, or his ear be gladdened by the music of that dear familiar voice.

When first the bereaved becomes sensible of his loss, as by little and little the fact that death has taken from his side the object of his affection, his devotion, perhaps the one centre of his thoughts and life, comes to be realised ; as, one by one, the lines of that picture of desolation which the world has become to him, begin to imprint themselves on his soul, and to the actual blank without, respond a void and hunger of the soul within, he is often for a time overwhelmed ; overcome by the evil of his destiny ; stupified with the wine of astonishment ; or else maddened to vain and wild rebellion against the Omnipotent and that awful law of death by which a poor humanity seems so ruthlessly tortured and distressed. Perhaps in the friend removed, there was garnered an inestimable store

of wisdom, and sympathy, and love. But lo, Death has come, and in a moment rifled all these treasures, the fruit of years of toil and suffering ; in a moment thrown to the dust the fair structure of a noble life, which it had cost so much to build. Alas, that stately Argosy, with its rich freight of matured experience, far-reaching insight, all-enfolding charity, has suddenly gone down in the mighty ocean of existence, and the silence of desolation reigns on the heaving billows of the leaden sea. The sufferer stands, a solitary figure, under a "universal dome of darkness ;" or, rather, he is as one bound with the chain of necessity to the rock of fate, who has become a prey to vultures of despair, it may be also of remorse, which assail his soul, while he casts a glance of helpless agony to those black heavens above, from which GOD appears to have departed. Yet ere long the hand of mercy will unbind that chain and set the poor sufferer free, and the gentle Dove of consolation will expand over that anguished soul his

healing wings. Resignation to the Supreme will replace that lawless spirit of rebellion, and the mourner will learn to acquiesce in the law of death, not merely as a necessity, but as a FATHER'S will. For Reason will assert her right to apply and enforce the lessons of Revelation, and he will school himself with such arguments as the following :—

If, as Scripture teaches, the object of man's life on earth be really to prepare him for heaven, it may be very necessary that his mind should be forced to think about the unseen world ; and what means more efficacious in taking his thoughts away into the invisible kingdom than the removal thither of one with whom his thoughts are indissolubly linked. Are we not taught, he will reflect, that one of the ends of man's existence here is that he may learn to live by faith, seeing the invisible ? What means, then, more fitted for conveying that lesson than the taking up into the spiritual world of one with whom, though distant and unseen, he

must necessarily still dwell much in thought. Or again, Is the object of GOD'S dealings with us here more especially this, to teach us to live by faith in His SON? Well, CHRIST takes the beloved to Himself, that finding the lost in JESUS, we may there more and more find JESUS too. The heart is raised to where the treasure is, that treasure is with JESUS, Himself the Pearl beyond all price; and thus the mourner in recovering the lost of earth, finds at the same moment their common LORD in heaven.

Other thoughts the Spirit of consolation will suggest to calm the troubled soul. If life be really a training-school for immortality; a scene where various lessons of wisdom are to be learnt, and where habits of submission and obedience to the Supreme are to be acquired by each individual for himself, and for herself, it is but natural that when these lessons and these habits are gained, the faithful servant should be called away into better and nobler conditions of ex-

istence. The infant is not kept in the nursery, nor the boy at school, nor the student at college ; the apprentice is not detained at his drudgery, nor the future doctor at the apothecary's, nor the engineer in the workshop, nor the soldier at his drill, any longer than is necessary. Each is, or such at least is the idea, promoted to a higher and nobler service as soon as he has sufficiently learnt the rudiments of his business. Thus the faithful servant of the Queen, who has learnt to rule by first learning to obey, may be elevated to the dignity of Governor over one of her splendid, if distant, colonies. The accession of dignity takes him far from his country, and leaves his friends to mourn his departure ; yet shall they not too deeply grieve that he is taken from them, for it is because he has learnt so well how to serve his sovereign here, that he has been judged fit and worthy to be commissioned to that higher service yonder. He who has wisely used his five talents on earth, is summoned hence to

the land that is very far off, there to hear, when the time shall come, "Well done, good and faithful servant, be thou ruler over ten cities : enter into the joy of thy LORD." It is natural, it is right that they should be removed, those noble, CHRIST-like souls. And if it be objected, "Yes, but removed by death, that seems such a terrible way ;" to this it is answered, It *is* a terrible way. But we are taught that death is the wages of sin, and its necessary punishment even in the good. And we must bow to this necessity.

Yet even this necessary death, a gracious Providence has changed into a blessing, making use of it in the education of His elect. For it must be remembered that this very loss of friends by death, has actually proved of the utmost benefit in training souls for Heaven. The discipline of bereavement may seem severe, but surely it cannot be called unsuccessful. Let the bereaved consider what have been the fruits of such discipline in that

very character whose loss he deploras. Was it not just by trials such as this he is enduring,—even by the loss of his own most cherished,—that the departed soul was fashioned while on earth into that fair image, whose very beauty makes it now so deeply mourned? Surely a system, however terrible it appear, cannot be bad which produces sublime results. A noble character, a CHRIST-like disposition, and a life so serenely beautiful, that its memory, like the light of the departed sun, but more enduring, will linger throughout all the hours of earth's long night.

Thus resigned to the Divine will, the mourner acquiesces in the law of separation and death. Then he says with David, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me," and from a vain and fruitless sorrow, turns to the work of life. But not so lightly will the clinging spirit be torn from the memory of the dead, or the current of its thoughts be forced into new and unfamiliar channels. Still the

fond soul will follow the departed, wonder where he lives, and under what conditions of existence, and endeavour to realise and live along with him his new life. What then do we know concerning those who are departed hence in faith, what manner of life is theirs who have fallen asleep in JESUS? Such is the question he will anxiously ask. And to this question we would now address ourselves, approaching with a reverent humility those sacred regions where dwell the holy dead, and feeling upon us all the awfulness of such a subject, yet venturing to approach, because determined to hear only what GOD the LORD in His Word will speak, and desirous to learn all that He has of His pity been pleased to make known. "The secret things indeed belong unto the LORD our GOD, but the things that are revealed belong," so far as they *are* revealed, "unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do them."¹

¹ Deut. xxix. 29.

Old Testament view of Hades.

To the writers of the Old Testament Scriptures, little seems to have been known concerning the condition of the holy dead. Some of them appear to have thought that Hades, the gloomy prison-house to which only the unbelieving are consigned, was indeed the receptacle for all the departed. That Hades is a dark and a dismal place ;¹ it is a pit situated in the centre of the earth, made fast with gates and bars ;² a region of gloom, where all things are forgotten ;³ where GOD is unknown ;⁴ where even a holy David expects to be blessed with no remembrance of GOD,⁵ and from which the good Hezekiah prays to be kept, because there GOD

¹ Job x. 21, 22.

² Job xxxiii. 28 ; xvii. 16.

³ Ps. lxxxviii. 5, 12.

⁴ Ps. cxv. 17.

⁵ Ps. vi. 5.

could be praised no more, nor in Hades could man hope for His truth.¹

Not that the Saints of old were entirely without a hope that GOD would one day open the gates of this prison-house and set His ransomed free. Men who had such strong faith in GOD as they had, could not but anticipate that He would at length deliver their souls from the hand of Hades ;² that they should one day awake as from a troubled sleep, and see His face in righteousness.³ A time should come when their dead men should live, and they, that dwelt in dust should arise and sing.⁴ GOD would ransom His chosen from the power of the grave, and redeem them from death ;⁵ nay, Death itself should be swallowed up in victory.⁶ "O Death, I will be thy plagues ; O Grave, I will be thy destruction."

Yet along with this hope of a final deliverance, of a restitution of all things, of

¹ Isa. xxxviii. 18.

² Ps. xlix. 15.

³ Ps. xvii. 15.

⁴ Isa. xxvi. 19.

⁵ Hosea xiii. 14.

⁶ Isa. xxv. 8.

which S. Peter assured the Jews none of the holy Prophets from the first had been ignorant,¹ there seems, as I have said, to have been also the anticipation of an intermediate existence after death in the dark and spectral land of Hades, where in sleep or hideous dreams the souls even of the righteous dead must await their deliverance. No wonder if such a prospect filled the holy men of old with sad foreboding, and made them through fear of death and of what should follow, all their lifetime subject to bondage.²

No Hades for the Holy Dead.

But the later Dispensation has let in its light upon these sad surmisings of the holy men of old. Christianity has unveiled what before was unknown,—and “blessed are our eyes, for they see.”³ Our

¹ Acts iii. 21.

² Heb. ii. 15.

³ S. Matth. xiii. 16.

SAVIOUR CHRIST has brought all the domains of life and immortality to light,¹ and to us revealed much of the condition of those who have departed hence in His faith and fear. For to Him belongeth the key of Hades and of Death.² He openeth, and no man shutteth ; where He openeth, we may presume to enter. What He has made known on this subject, Who is the Truth,³ it is ours thankfully to receive, implicitly to believe.

Now in all the teaching of JESUS there is nothing to lead us to believe that the fears of the just men of old had any real foundation, or that any place of darkness, like Hades, awaited their spirits when they died. CHRIST has abolished Hades for the good,—both for those who believed in a coming MESSIAH, and for those who believe in Him that is come. Indeed for His Saints CHRIST has even in a sense abolished death : “ If a man keep My

¹ 2 Tim. i. 10.

² Rev. i. 18.

³ S. John xiv. 6.

saying, he shall never see death.”¹ For to the faithful, death is not by any means the same thing that it is to man by nature. To him it is rather a silver bridge over a raging hell of waters, conducting safely the ransomed soul to the green slopes and flowery glades of Paradise. It was more especially in the last days of His life on earth, that our LORD made known the immediate fate of the believing when they are summoned hence. “I am the Resurrection and the Life,” He said at Bethany, “he that believeth in Me, though he were dead,” referring to the dissolution of the body, “yet shall he (continue to) live.”² He foretold that His servants should be with Him where He was: “Where I am, there shall also My servant be.”³ And we know that where He went to abide could never be such a gloomy land as Hades, but must be an abode of peace and light. In direct proof of this, we have His own sure word.

¹ S. John viii. 51; ² Tim. i. 10.

³ S. John xi. 25.

³ S. John xii. 26.

The region which He said the penitent thief should enter on the very day of his death He described as, not Hades but, Paradise : " Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."¹

Christ's Descent into Hades.

Before dwelling upon these deeply significant words, it may be necessary, in order to avoid misconception, to notice that Scripture teaches that our Blessed LORD did also on the day of His death enter Hades, the place of the unconverted dead. The Creed says, " He descended into Hell," or Hades. S. Peter tells us wherefore. Having suffered for sins, JESUS " was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which (in His Spirit) He also went to the spirits in prison and preached to them."² His Spirit, reviving after the shock of dissolution which

¹ S. Luke xxiii. 43.

² 1 S. Pet. iii. 18, 19.

laid His body in the dust of death, went straightway into the mansions of Hades, and preached to the multitudes of unsaved of the time of Noah, which were still in prison there. But a few, eight souls, had then been saved; to the rest CHRIST preached, saving them. Nor to those alone of the time of Noah was the Gospel thus preached, but generally to the dead, that they might be "judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to GOD in the spirit."¹ Their bodies had indeed been punished with death, but through the preaching of CHRIST their spirits should yet live. Thus then through the descent into Hades, multitudes there, both of Noah's time and of other times, were saved; even so "by the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST"² He saves multitudes on earth. For it is the power of His Resurrection as set forth in Baptism which saves the living. "Baptism doth also now save us."² Now ascended to the right hand of GOD, He Who went down into

¹ 1 S. Pet. iv. 6.

² 1 S. Pet. iii. 21.

Hades, and rose again from the dead, reigns King over all His ransomed ones. "He is gone into Heaven, and is on the right hand of GOD ; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him."¹

Paradise.

Manifestly it was not to the gloomy region where those disobedient spirits dwelt, that the dying SAVIOUR invited the penitent thief. Such was not the place where He promised to meet him and reward his faith. Our LORD had indeed to enter Hades, but that same day He was to appear in a far different realm,—the Kingdom of the Holy Dead,—the domain of the Church Quiescent. "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

What did He Whose every word was Truth, intend to teach the thief on the cross, and us, concerning the condition of

¹ 1 S. Pet. iii. 22.

existence into which those persons immediately pass who depart hence in penitence and in faith. That very day the dying man was to be in Paradise, with JESUS in Paradise. What do these words imply? Nor let it be forgotten that whatever they shall be found to teach, holds good of all who die in the LORD. Whatever be the nature of that existence which was accorded to a malefactor converted at the eleventh hour, it is, we may be sure, the portion of our departed Christian friends,—especially of those who, only after many a hard-fought field and many a weary march, after long years of faithful and laborious service, have crossed the Jordan of death and passed into the eternal world. Yes, ye mourners, you may be sure of this, your beloved dead who have died in the LORD, are in Paradise,—are with JESUS in Paradise!

Paradise,—such is the word used by CHRIST to show the nature of that country, and that life into which the holy dead depart. And what ideas does that

word convey? The phrase is of course *figurative*, not to be taken literally, but conveying certain definite ideas. For whenever in Scripture we find different figures used to express the same thing, we may be sure that no one of these figures exactly expresses that thing. When for instance we find the future place of punishment described in one place as the outer darkness,¹ in another, as a lake of fire and brimstone,² we may be sure that hell is neither exactly a lake of fire, nor an outer darkness; but that we are to understand that it is a condition both of utter desolation and of terrible punishment. And the future resting-place of souls is also differently depicted,—here it is called Paradise, elsewhere “Abraham’s bosom,” and in the Book of Revelation it is spoken of as “under the Altar.” What are we then to learn from our LORD’S use of this figurative expression Paradise?

The phrase is used by ourselves occasionally of some delicious spot, all roses,

¹ S. Matth. viii. 12.

² Rev. xx. 15.

and sunshine, and gladness. Of such a scene of repose and tranquil beauty we say, "It is an earthly Paradise." Now the people of CHRIST's time would understand very much the same thing by this word. It is employed by Greek writers to describe a beautiful park, softly undulating, with velvet sward flower-enamelled, adorned with trees of wondrous grace and fragrance, and traversed by many a gay and winding brook.¹ Very similar was the idea which the Jewish Rabbis in the time of CHRIST had of the future world. In the Second Book of Esdras,² Paradise is described as a fair garden, with streams flowing with milk and honey, and mountains covered over with lilies and roses. The idea then which people of that time would receive, and which accordingly our LORD intended to convey, regarding the region to which the souls of believers pass at death is, in the

¹ Smith's Dictionary of the Bible. Article "Paradise."

² 2 Esdras ii. 19.

first place, the idea of an abode amid scenes of beauty far surpassing (as we may well conceive) even the fairest scenes of earth.

5. Paul in Paradise.

Into this fair land of Paradise the Apostle Paul was on at least one supremely blest occasion lifted up, and there was favoured with "visions and revelations of the LORD." What he saw he cannot tell us, what he heard he may not repeat. Enough it was such a manifestation of the glory of CHRIST as he ever afterwards looked back upon with holy joy. "I will come to visions and revelations of the LORD. I knew a man in CHRIST, (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, GOD knoweth,) how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unuttered, or unutterable words, which it is not in a man's power to utter."¹

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 1, 3, 4.

From this intimation we learn concerning Paradise that it is a place where the SON of GOD reveals Himself, and where words are heard unutterable in the languages of mortals. The blessed who attain to that world are taught far more of CHRIST, the Wisdom of GOD, than it was possible for them to learn on earth, or than earthly language could express.

Abraham's Bosom.

Our LORD also describes the future life under the figure of Abraham's bosom.¹ And our knowledge of what the Jews understood by this phrase, as well as the context in which it occurs,² reveal what the words are designed to teach. Whilst the selfish Dives is enduring torment in Hades, Lazarus who on earth had suffered poverty and neglect, is represented as lying in Abraham's bosom, whither Angels had conveyed him ; and there, it is

¹ S. Luke xvi. 22.

² S. Luke xvi. 25.

said, he is comforted. We are thus to understand of the intermediate state that it is a place of infinite refreshment and consolation. This implies of course that it is a vastly happier state than that by which it is preceded. It implies also that those who attain that world shall have made a mighty advance in knowledge, and learnt to understand in a new sense and in a wider light their whole past earthly history.

Under the Altar.

A third figure is used in the New Testament to describe the state of the departed. "I saw," says S. John, "under the Altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of GOD, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O LORD, holy and true, dost Thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given

unto every one of them, and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season."¹ These words reveal to us much concerning the condition of the holy dead, and their relations towards those who remain on earth. They show, as we shall have occasion to consider subsequently, that they are aware at least to some extent of what is passing here, but that this knowledge does not mar their felicity ; for when they cry to the GOD of Judgment to interpose, and restore order to a distracted world, they receive white robes,—emblems of peace and gladness,—and are bidden wait contentedly, and continue yet a little season in their rest.

Thus far then we have gathered from these three figures,—Paradise, Abraham's Bosom, Under the Altar,—that the souls of the holy dead are in the repose and peace of a blissful region, amid scenes of beauty and enchantment, of serene and holy contemplation. There they are ad-

¹ Rev. vi. 9, 10, 11.

mitted to glorious visions and revelations of the LORD, and hear unutterable words of grace and truth. There they are in a place of consolation, where the weary are at rest, and the poor destitute is comforted. The past mysterious dealings of Providence are explained to them there, and they are taught fully to understand why on earth they were destitute, afflicted, tormented. The enigma of their life is solved, and looking back from the "ampler day" which there they breathe, upon their earthly history, they see the faithfulness of their GOD, and the wisdom of His dealings,—and, seeing, they are satisfied.

But when the murmur of the mighty sea of human sin and woe piercing the stillness of that hallowed land of souls, awakes their sympathy for their distressed brethren on earth, and stirs their yearnings for the final consummation, the reign of righteousness ; those souls beneath the Altar, that is very near to the Presence and the Glory, pour their plaint into the

ear of the LORD of Sabaoth, crying : How long, O LORD, Holy and True? and presently unto every one of them white robes are given, and the spirit of peace and gladness, and they are commanded to wait yet a little season in their rest, until the purpose of Ineffable Wisdom hath fulfilled itself, and the time appointed to remember Sion, yea, her set time, is come.¹

Have the Departed Bodies?

In inquiring further into the circumstances of the life of the after-world, a question arises as to whether we are taught by Scripture to think of the departed as inhabiting any kind of bodily frame. That they are not yet furnished with their proper bodies is plain, for we are clearly taught that they obtain these only at the Resurrection.²

Then, and not before, shall the re-

¹ Ps. cii. 13.

² 1 Cor. xv. 42, 52.

deemed receive their fit and perfect bodily tabernacles, which, though they are represented as rising from the earth at the voice of the Son of Man,¹ are not to be thought of as fashioned of the same clay as that which was buried there, for that was material, earthly, and corruptible,² whereas these new bodies shall be of a nature spiritual, celestial and incorruptible.³ Now, the souls in Paradise, together with the rest of creation, are still waiting for the manifestation of the sons of GOD, for the full and perfect "sonship," which will, S. Paul seems to imply, be simultaneous with the redemption of the body at the Resurrection.⁴

But it may be asked, Have the spirits of the holy dead, then, no bodies whatever until the Resurrection? Are they pure spirits unclothed in any corporeal mantle? If we are taught to believe this, it would be most difficult for us to form

¹ S. John v. 28, 29; 1 Cor. xv. 52.

² 1 Cor. xv. 44, 47, 42.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 44, 48, 42.

⁴ Rom. viii. 19, 23.

any conception of the life of the departed. We cannot conceive pure spirit existing in any definite locality ; nor can the mind dwell on any object of thought apart from place. It would therefore be impossible for us to form any conception of their life. We are encouraged to think of them as in Paradise ; we hear of them as in a place of consolation ; they are represented as hearing words, as seeing visions, as crying with a loud voice under the Altar : we must therefore think of the souls of the dead as endued with some kind of bodily vestment. Further, we read that on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elias appeared talking with JESUS. The very subject of their discourse is overheard,—it is “ His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.”¹ We have moreover the express declaration of an inspired Apostle. S. Paul, speaking of the condition into which he expected to pass at death, says that it would not be an entirely disembodied state. “ We

¹ S. Luke ix. 31.

know," he says, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of GOD, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."¹ He anticipated that when his earthly tabernacle or dwelling-place, i.e., his fleshly body went to pieces in the shock of death, he should receive from heaven a building of GOD, partaking of eternity, which was reserved for him above. In the present body, he says, we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.² He should not like, he says, to be quite unclothed, but rather "clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life," (i.e., that he might be set free for ever from the trammels of his frail, sinful, mortal body.) Nor does the Apostle in these anticipations of a bodily frame in the after-life, refer to his resurrection-body, as some commentators have supposed. For it is evident he does not expect that till the end of all things,³ whereas the house

¹ 2 Cor. v. 1.² Ib. 2.³ 1 Cor. xv.

from Heaven spoken of in 2 Cor. v. he expects at his death. Moreover his resurrection-body he looked for from the earth, whereas (verse 2) that in which he was to pass his time in Paradise was to come from Heaven. So then we conclude that those in the intermediate state are not entirely disembodied. Doubtless their frames are of a very subtle nature. Still they are of the nature of things sensible, and can be heard, and felt, and seen.

Thus far then we have seen concerning those who die in the LORD, that they dwell in certain bodily frames, in a place called Paradise, the land of consolation, near the Altar and the Ineffable Glory. Their abode is thus an outer court of the Celestial Temple, a vestibule of the Palace of the King Eternal, Immortal, and Invisible. They dwell in the sweet and holy light which comes mellowed from the too resplendent Throne of Deity, and the distant strains of Angelic Hallelujahs come wafted on the breeze to their

region of repose to awake their more subdued, yet joyful songs.

The Life with Jesus in Paradise.

If now we inquire more particularly into the nature of their life, and endeavour to gather together the various notes and intimations of Scripture on this subject, the thing which strikes us as the special feature of their state is this, that it is a life with CHRIST. "To-day thou shalt be with ME in Paradise."

Now it is indeed true that the believer even on earth is with his LORD. Joined to Him in the closest manner, as the Vine to its branches, the Head to its members, his SAVIOUR is part of his very self. Still, on earth he is often unable to realise this fact. Often things seen and temporal appear to interpose between him and his LORD, and he cannot feel himself to be continuously with CHRIST. But when death comes, it cuts the cords

which bind him to the world of sense, it removes from about him his terrestrial body, and sets his spirit free to go straight to the LORD. Let none suppose that death injuriously affects the soul. It destroys indeed the animal life of the body, it may also cause a severe shock to the soul, but there is no ground for believing that it can in any way sever that soul from CHRIST. On the contrary, Scripture gives many such assurances as the following: "My sheep," said JESUS, "shall never perish; I give unto them eternal life, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand."¹ Death then shall not be able to do this. "I am persuaded," says S. Paul, "that neither life nor *death* shall be able to separate us from the love of GOD which is in CHRIST JESUS our LORD."² Through the catastrophe of dissolution, the faithful SAVIOUR still holds fast His own. Still "the LORD preserveth all them that love Him,"³ and "He does not

¹ S. John x. 27, 28.

² Rom. viii. 38, 39.

³ Ps. cxlv. 20.

leave off His kindness to the living *and the dead.*"¹ "CHRIST died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, (live or die,) we should live together with Him."² The life which the Apostles looked for after death was preeminently a life with CHRIST. When they became absent from the body, they would be present with the LORD.³ Thus S. Paul, "I have a desire to depart and to be with CHRIST."⁴ Yes; the believer on the day of his death goes to be with CHRIST, in a new and deeper sense than he ever was, or ever could be while on earth. Set free from the burden of flesh, he is in the immediate presence of his LORD. The Son of Man is indeed in Heaven, "set down at the Right Hand of the Throne of GOD."⁵ Still He is present in a special sense in His "kingdom"⁶ in Paradise. We know this, for there He promised to be with the penitent thief, and there He manifested Himself to S.

¹ Ruth ii. 20.

² 2 Cor. v. 8.

³ Heb. xii. 2.

⁴ 1 Thess. v. 10.

⁵ Phil. i. 3.

⁶ S. Luke xxiii. 43.

Paul.¹ His Presence is felt like a sun, an all-absorbing power which can never be forgotten. The Redeemed can never be unconscious of this glorious Presence. He holds enrapturing communion with them, and they with Him.

And this is the reason why we are to understand that as the Church teaches in her Burial Service, "the souls of the faithful after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh are in joy and felicity." They are with JESUS, and whatever, as we shall presently see, there is in their condition to render their happiness incomplete, still His Presence sheds on all holy joy.

And oh, what bliss is implied in such intercourse with JESUS! Say, you who have known the joy of unrestrained and loving fellowship with a large-hearted earthly friend, and who, in the society of one whose converse was like a "liberal education," have roamed in joyous freedom through the rich and varied domain of

¹ 2 Cor xii. 2—4.

contemplation, gathering choicest flowers of poesy, and breathing the genial and reviving air of thought ; what would it be for you to walk and converse in the Paradise of GOD with Him Who is the very Wisdom of GOD ; into Whose lips grace is poured ; of Whom, even whilst in His humiliation-body on earth, it was said, " Never man spake like this Man,"¹ and Whose words were full of eternal life ?² And you who have known on earth by faith the character of JESUS, Whom having not seen you yet have loved, and Whose cherished presence with you here sweetens every cup of sorrow, and lines with silver every gloomy cloud, oh, what will it be for you to be with Him in that calm land of souls, where you shall see Him eye to eye, and be able to tell Him all that is in your heart ! Such bliss shall be yours, if you are His ; such bliss is now the portion of your beloved who have fallen asleep in Him.

¹ S. John vii. 46.

² S. John vi. 68.

The Holy Dead not in Purgatory.

The state of the departed is thus above all things a life with the LORD. Let us mark what follows from this. It follows in the first place that the condition of the holy dead,—even of the least and the latest of their number,—cannot be one of intense suffering. For this would seriously disturb communion with CHRIST, and prevent the full and constant consciousness of His love. Therefore the doctrine of purgatorial fires to try and to purify the Saints,—a dogma unknown in the earlier and purer ages of the Church,—must receive no countenance. The idea is destitute of any foundation in GOD'S Word. There is indeed one passage which at first sight seems to favour it. It is this, "If any man's work," says S. Paul, "shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by (or through) fire."¹ Yet this

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 15.

passage, as Dean Stanley has well shown, refers not to the intermediate state, but to the final conflagration at the Great Day of the LORD, "Every man's work shall be made manifest ; the Day shall declare it."¹ Then the bad work built on the good Foundation will be destroyed to the disappointment and grief of the builder ; yet he himself shall be saved as through fire, "coming out singed and scorched as by an escape out of a burning ruin."² There is no allusion to Purgatory here : and even Roman Catholic Divines have ceased to cite this passage in defence of their doctrine. We have indeed no ground for believing a dogma which it would be so hard to reconcile with the other intimations of Scripture respecting the state of the Saints in the after-life. We must therefore conclude that there they undergo no acute agonies nor distracting torments. Whatever pain may be involved in the deepening of their re-

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 13.

² Stanley on Corinthians, 3rd Edit., p. 62.

pentance, and their further preparation for Heaven, it will not be permitted to destroy their peace, nor interrupt their communion with their LORD.

Their condition not one of sleep.

From the fact that the departed live in and with JESUS in Paradise, it follows further that their condition cannot be one of sleep. There is indeed no reason to believe that the soul ever does sleep. Philosophers tell us that even when the body is wrapped in deepest slumber, the mind is ever awake and active.¹ We often fancy that we pass a night without dreaming. Such is not, however, the case. We forget our dreams, that is all. Any night, if suddenly awaked, we should find our mind busy about something. For it is not possible for the spirit to sleep. The repose of that never-tiring agent is not slumber, but change of occu-

¹ Hamilton's Lectures on Metaphysics.

pation. Hence, when the Bible speaks of the dead as having fallen asleep, it is only the body that is referred to. One quotation will suffice to show this : "CHRIST died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep," i.e., whether we remain on earth or depart hence, "we should *live* together with Him."¹

Their condition not one of labour.

Nor on the other hand are we to think of the condition of the holy dead as one of active and laborious employment, like that of earth. Our SAVIOUR compared the future state to the night, because in it no man could work.² We are told indeed that the works of the saints follow them thither.³ Yet there they engage not in those arduous and self-denying labours which made their earthly life so hard and

¹ 1 Thess. v. 10.

² S. John ix. 4.

³ Rev. xiv. 13.

burdensome. They "rest from their labours."

And this brings us to consider the positive circumstances of their life. Negatively we have seen what the holy dead do not do : how that in Paradise they neither suffer, nor slumber, nor struggle and labour. What then, let us now inquire, are the actual occupations and employments of those who, having fallen asleep in JESUS, live unto Him still ?

The Life of Rest.

Speaking generally, we know that they are in a state of rest. Paradise is the middle state between earth and Heaven. On earth the Church is militant ; in Heaven triumphant ; in Paradise quiescent. On earth she painfully takes up her cross ; in Heaven she will victoriously follow the Lamb ;¹ in Paradise she peacefully rests² from her labours.

¹ Rev. xiv. 4.

² Dan. xii. 13.

The rest of Paradise is not however inaction. On the contrary it implies, as we shall see, full and free energizing. The powers of the mind and of the body (whatever the precise capacities of that new "house from Heaven" may be) shall be all in active operation. For we are taught that the holy dead are *blessed* in their rest. And we know that there is no high happiness for man but in the conscious forth-putting in obedience to the will of GOD of the powers which GOD has given him. At the same time these capacities shall never be painfully taxed or strained, for this again were inconsistent with the idea of *rest*. Their life, compared with the storms and conflicts of earth, is a life of repose. Prophetic were the dying words of the Christian warrior,¹ "Let us pass over the river and rest under the shade of the trees!" The believer has indeed crossed the dark river and has reached the land of rest. The prayer we often find on tombstones is heard,—re-

¹ Stonewall Jackson.

quiescat in pace. "They that have believed do enter into rest."¹ And theirs is especially a *religious* rest, a rest in GOD : for it is compared in the Epistle to the Hebrews to the rest of the Sabbath : "There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-rest (σαββατισμὸς) to the people of GOD."²

Still the holy dead are not in Paradise merely that they may rest there from the toils and conflicts of the world. Nor are they there merely to wait for the final glory. For GOD does not appoint a barren time of waiting to His intelligent, and as yet imperfect creatures. For what purpose then are they there ?

Progressing towards Perfection.

The holy dead are in the realm of Paradise that they may be perfected. They are there to improve and develope, and to make up that which was lacking. How needful this is even we can see. We,

¹ Heb. iv. 4.

² Heb. iv. 9.

who have so poor an idea of perfection, can yet see that the dying saint passes away compassed with imperfections and infirmities. His heart indeed is true to his SAVIOUR, and his will is already in great measure fixed in goodness. He has become, no doubt, sincerely submissive to the will of GOD, and honestly anxious to keep all His commandments. He has discovered what he owes to CHRIST, and places all his confidence in His power to save and to sanctify. But ah, his will is in many cases still so weak! His heart how wavering! His hold on the world how persistent! His prejudices too are, it may be, strong and stubborn. His intellectual views of truth retain perhaps the faults of his education, and are exceedingly narrow and one-sided. Fortunately his heart, his CHRIST-like charity, is greater than his intellect, and he is happily inconsistent enough to believe that some men are good who yet think very differently from himself. But neither in heart nor in head is he nearly fit, when

he leaves the body, for the perfect Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps in the busy life he led on earth the child of GOD has had little time to deepen his nature by reflection, or train his conscience by self-examination, or extend the limits of his intellectual horizon. Who indeed would dare to say of any one he knows well, and whose departure he witnesses, that he has gone hence clothed in the perfect robe of righteousness, and fit for the holy societies of Heaven? We do not indeed presume to judge our brethren, far less those we love, and least of all those who have gone from us dying exemplary and holy deaths. But which of us endowed with reason and able to understand somewhat of the awful holiness of Heaven, will dare to say that any of our friends has left us fit to enter there? On the contrary, have we not seen the old faults reappearing even to the last, infirmities of temper or otherwise, the ruling passion strong, though greatly weakened by grace, even in death? And how can such a person

be ready for GOD'S holy presence? He has, it may be, habits of thinking and ways of judging which even in the eyes of worldly men are incorrect or uncharitable ; possibly there may be a habit in his life which is not wholly innocent. Is he to pass into the Holiest of all unenlightened and uncorrected? He has faults far back it may be in his life, and sins of youth, never recalled, hence never repented of ; never repented of, hence never pardoned. Indeed he has ten thousand sins upon his soul which he never knew to be sins, and does not now believe to have been sins. Is he fit to enter Heaven in this darkness, self-ignorance, and impenitence? Nor let it be thought that he will be shown all this in the moment of death, as by a magical forth-putting of Divine power,—that not only all his unknown sins will then come to light, but that in the same moment all will be repented of and forgiven, and his mental and moral constitution undergo a sudden miraculous change. There is no warrant in Scripture for such

an hypothesis. It is contrary to all GOD's dealings with us. To Him indeed nothing is impossible, but if He were to change His mode of dealing with us, and instead of teaching us, and making us grow into His likeness, were to begin to perform such experiments on us, and by a magical exercise of His power convulse and transform us, we may feel certain He would have told us of the change. How requisite then for the departed a place of perfecting like the holy rest of Paradise ! How desirable for him a time for calm reflection, a season of recollection, opportunities to overlook with a larger eye the ways of Providence in the conduct of his life on earth ! How desirable for him a sojourn in a peaceful abode of healing and restoration, where from the gate of Heaven, underneath the Altar, he may contemplate in the light of eternity, the things of time ! And such a season of improvement and place of refreshment are vouchsafed to the departed in the Paradise of GOD. There all things be-

come clear to him ; his mind expands to receive the great thoughts which well up from the abyss of being ; his heart enlarges itself together with his mind. There he has for his Instructor JESUS CHRIST Himself, the very Wisdom of GOD, Who is indeed so near to him that He is the very atmosphere in which he breathes. The all-pervading Spirit of knowledge informs his understanding, and, breathing upon the flowers of love and piety which, long sown by grace, had never on earth fully bloomed, causes them to blossom forth in perfection of beauty. And thus divinely influenced and instructed, his soul, now no longer distracted and oppressed by the trammels of the flesh, progresses rapidly in its development towards the maturity of full Christian manhood, and gains the end of its original predestination, viz., to be conformed to the image of the SON of GOD.¹

¹ Rom. viii. 29.

Means of Improvement: Recollection and Reflection.

If now we inquire more particularly into the means of improvement of the Saints in Paradise, we shall find that, subordinate of course to the direct influence of JESUS and His Spirit, from which alone other influences derive their efficacy, there are two great means of growth, viz., Reflection, based on Recollection and intelligent Sympathy with the ways of Providence in earthly life ; and the Communion of Saints.

It is written, "Blessed are the dead which die in the LORD ; their works do follow them."¹ As it is said of the wicked that their sins go before them to Judgment,² so here of the righteous that their works come up after them into Paradise. One by one each action of his earthly life rises before the saint,—each scene, each event, each word, each thought,

¹ Rev. xiv. 13.

² 1 Tim. v. 24.

emerges from out the past, and appears before him clear and defined, lighted up by a ray out of GOD'S Eternity. And as these arise in succession before his soul, the saint reflects upon them, judges, decides ; he notes what in these deeds and thoughts is good, what indifferent, what bad. He puts the actions of life through a sifting and winnowing process, and learns to form a right judgment in all things. Origen says of Paradise that it is a school in which men are trained to judge rightly of the events and experiences of life. In this view it is emphatically a place of Recollection. The Psalmist inquired in doubt, whether GOD'S wondrous works could be known in the dark, or His righteousness in the land where all things are forgotten.¹ But the resting-place which awaits GOD'S people is now known to be no such region. On the contrary, it is a land where all things are remembered ; where indeed men remember as vividly as we on earth perceive ;

¹ Ps. lxxxviii. 12.

and where, in their past lives seen in the clear mirror of memory, His righteousness is shown them and His wondrous works in all the way by which He led them up through this world's wilderness.

But whilst these recollections must excite their admiring wonder, and awake their grateful praises, they must also be attended with sad reflections. For the redeemed must perceive how much chaff has mingled with the wheat even of their noblest works, and how the dross of selfishness and vanity has impaired the value of the fine gold of their labours of love. Oh, how differently they would have felt and acted on this occasion and that, had they but realised more keenly the importance of eternity, and been more fully alive to the love which had redeemed them! Here in the near Presence of GOD, they realise, as they never could do on earth, that Holiness before which the Seraphim veil their faces with their wings, and the Prophet exclaimed, "Woe is me,

for I am a man of unclean lips.”¹ This contemplation will awake a deep sense of shame, revealing to them the depths of their own depravity as they never knew it before. Reflections such as these must impair their felicity,—and this is indeed one of the causes why the happiness of Paradise is not perfect blessedness. Yet not even such self-upbraiding thoughts shall be suffered seriously to disturb the bliss of their fellowship with JESUS. It is CHRIST Himself Who points out to them these shortcomings, and this circumstance takes the sting from remorse. If a person whom we loved and revered were to review with us our conduct on any given occasion, and show us our omissions and mistakes, we should indeed feel humbled, but not greatly cast down, for the eye and tone of love of our friend and counsellor would soften the frown of displeasure on his brow. Nor can we suppose that the anguish of remorse can come near a ransomed soul who knows that his past

¹ Isa. vi. 5.

errors are all for ever forgiven, and shall henceforth be forgotten, and who reflects that he has now reached a condition of existence in which he can sin no more.

Their Sympathy with Earthly Life.

But not only does the dweller in Paradise improve by reflecting on the past, he is also enabled to see far into the mysteries of the present. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant."¹ With the clear eye of faith he is able to pierce the surface and the form of things, and to apprehend their deep and hidden nature. The ancients spoke of the after-world as the under-world, and thought the dead dwelt in the centre of the earth. The truth underlying this erroneous view is this, that their life is beneath not in place but in depth. They live a deeper, a profounder existence than ours, going

¹ Ps. xxv. 13.

down into things, understanding the idea and the essence, where we see only the form and the appearance.¹ The departed has become a subtle, a "diffusive power," mixed in a sense "with GOD and Nature."² Under the guidance of that Spirit which searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of GOD,³ he is enabled to understand far more than we of the laws by which the world is governed, alike in Nature, Providence, and Grace.

Do the departed, then, really know what is going on in the world? A question this of the deepest interest, but one which can receive only a partial answer. Of the laws by which GOD governs the world, they understand already far more than we, and they are advancing rapidly towards a full intelligence of these laws. They perceive the principles which are at work in the world. The mighty conflict

¹ Die Christliche Dogmatik, by Bishop Martensen of Zealand. (English Translation, Clarke, Edinburgh.)

² Tennyson, In Memoriam.

³ 1 Cor. ii. 10.

between good and evil is plain before their eyes. They know generally how that conflict is proceeding. They watch it as spectators with a deep and anxious interest.¹ We have indeed no reason to believe that they are acquainted with the details of individual life on earth, except in so far as, in particular instances, GOD may be pleased to make these circumstances known to them. But that in general they are aware whether good or evil is victorious on earth, the Apostle's allusion to the cloud of witnesses, and, still more directly, the account of the souls under the Altar show. These knew that their martyr-brethren were still unavenged. The thought of this prolonged triumph of evil and oppression of the Church gave them pain, until they were clothed with white robes of joy and commanded to rest for a season. Thus the sins and sorrows of mankind cause a pang in those abodes of peace. Yet not so as to mar their felicity who see all

¹ Heb. xii. 1.

things in the light of eternal love. When the soul is taken possession of by a great and abiding joy, no sorrow can seriously impair its gladness.

But if the sorrows of their brethren on earth are powerless to disturb their joy, their sympathy with our holier thoughts and aspirations may well be supposed to increase their pleasure,—as the knowledge of that sympathy imparts strength and consolation to us. They dwell beneath, as we have seen, in the secret of things, ranging in thought amid the “deep things of GOD.” And when we descend into thought, there we meet them. Not on the upper surface of things, not amid the turmoil and distractions of busy life, do we meet the departed or hold communion with those who are at home in the LORD; no, but when we seek them in Him in Whom they live, in the calm hour of serene and mournful recollection, when starts the silent tear, or breaks forth the unutterable sigh, when our spirit, wandering far away from the actual world

around us, moves amid things unseen, and to its searching eye the secret meaning of events is unveiled, and the mysteries of existence are made known ; when, despairing of the life that now is, and all its hopes centred on the life that is to come, the soul, weary and heavy-laden, sinks like a worn-out child upon its FATHER'S heart ; there, in peaceful communion with GOD in CHRIST, there, in the secret place of the Most High and beneath the shadow of His wing, we are permitted to hold intercourse with those who are departed, and are through them cheered and consoled.

Their Intercessions for us.

It is needless to ask the question, Do the departed intercede for us? Does the mother in Paradise remember to approach the throne of grace on behalf of her child on earth, whom even in the midst of her busy life below she had found much time

to pray for? Or has the Christian Priest forgotten to bear on his heart before the Altar his own spiritual children whom when in this world he had daily commended to GOD? Our departed friends know our danger better than we, and know also better the power of supplication. We may be sure then they remember us. We may not indeed ask them, we may not ask even the most exalted Saints, the blessed Virgin, or S. John to pray for us, for we are not given to understand that they can hear us ; on the contrary we are commanded to pray to GOD alone, and surely all the time we can devote to addressing the Hearer of Prayer is not too much for our need, or His greatness. But though we may not invoke the Saints, we may, we must believe in their communion with us, in their loving interest in us, and their prayers on our behalf. We may well rejoice to know that we are aided in our warfare, and supported in our sorrows by the power of GOD obtained for us by their intercessions.

Our Prayers for them.

We are frequently taught in GOD'S Holy Word to pray for our friends, but we are nowhere taught to cease to pray for them when they fall asleep in CHRIST and are here no more seen. That it is a holy thing to pray for all,—the dead who live unto GOD, as well as those who live amongst us here, the Church has ever believed, and all the Primitive Liturgies contain prayers for the dead. It is not a point much insisted on by our own Church, for indeed Christian love does not need to be told to pray for its friends after they are gone hence. But the Church of England when in her Communion Service she prays that "we and all His whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His Passion," bears witness that that communion is an act of intercession on behalf of *all* GOD'S family, whether here or yonder.

Surely having once been commanded to pray for those we love, we should require another equally distinct admonition against prayers for the dead, if it was really GOD'S will that our prayers should cease. Or at least we should require to be informed distinctly that our friend, once departed, no longer needs our supplications. But so far from this being the case, the spirits of the departed have not yet reached their perfect consummation and bliss, they are still in a state of imperfectness and preparation, their happiness is impaired by sad recollections, by the consciousness of the miseries and sins of men, and the souls beneath the Altar cry, How long? They have not all completed their repentance, and none of them have passed the Final Tribunal. Therefore we need neither express precept nor example in the Bible to teach us that it is at once our duty and our privilege to continue our prayers for them. On the other hand it is equally evident that a more pressing duty is to pray much for our friends still

living on the earth, and for ourselves, for we are still beset with temptations, and in danger of losing our place in Paradise altogether, whereas our departed friends, if not perfect, at least ~~are~~ safe.

Intercourse of the Holy Dead.

Another great means of the progressive development of the Saints in Paradise is undoubtedly their fellowship one with another. How much has Christian friendship to do with the salvation of sinners upon earth, how much with the building-up of the Body of CHRIST! How often has the erring child of GOD been brought back to his FATHER'S House by the earnest and seasonable efforts of a friend who had himself found the joy and peace of believing. And again when faltering on the narrow way, or sorely tempted by the seductions of sin, how frequently has an hour's genial intercourse with a wise and large-hearted Christian soul been the

means of restoring him to right views of life and duty, and making him resolve to follow CHRIST, at whatever cost of natural inclination, along the thorny path of self-denial!

Is anything on earth so sweet as the communion of GOD'S people, or anything so improving? when they that fear the LORD speak one to another;¹ when souls knit together by love to a common Master, strengthen one another by speaking of His grace, disclose the several ways by which His Providence has led them, and stimulate each other to fresh vigour in His service by dwelling on the glorious prospect of His most sure reward. And if the fellowship of Christians here proves so blissful, and actually does so much towards the grand result,—the perfecting of the saints; can we suppose that in the abodes of Paradise, this method of improvement will not find place?

Or again, (to view this from another side,) is it likely that He Who loves with

¹ Mal. iii. 16.

an everlasting love each soul which He has redeemed, and Who has taught us to love one another for His sake, will deny to us a continuance of that love in the Paradise of GOD? Shall those who have on earth been the means of teaching one another to love Him, not so much as recognise each other in the after-life? It is ungracious to suppose it ; but not less unreasonable. The end of His commandment is charity. To increase the mass of love in His universe He died. Nor will He suffer our mutual love to fade away like the light of evening, or the fragrance of a flower. We may feel quite certain, judging from the whole analogy of Scripture, that the love of the Saints for one another, will in so far as it has been subordinated to their devotion to Him, still have scope in the world beyond, into which this love shall assuredly be carried with them, as indeed it is an inalienable portion of their immortal spirits. And this charity, thus transferred to the congenial soil of Paradise, will blossom with

a loveliness such as earth could never know.

For the intercourse of those who have loved each other in the flesh will there be set forward under new and more favourable conditions. It will be freed from all the reserve and misunderstandings, all the littlenesses and conceits which had circumscribed and hindered their fellowship below. Soon too will friendship extend amongst the denizens of that blissful region. Acquaintances will be easily made in a land where all desire to be honest and sincere, and clear as the day. Men will soon know each other when they meet, feeling that, though strangers, they have a mutual Friend in JESUS,—JESUS, the LORD of that whole realm,—JESUS, Who owns as a brother the lowliest there. Surely where all are living in and with the LORD, engaging in a common worship, drinking together daily at the Fountain of the water of life ; where hearts are hourly expanding, and intellects hourly ripening ; where one common hope and

yearning fills every breast for the coming of the Resurrection morn, we may well conceive that souls are ready to hold free and happy intercourse together. And thus through blessed communion do the Saints circulate knowledge, and mutually enkindle ardour. The flame of charity which radiates forth from CHRIST shines brightly in that happy land, being reflected from soul to soul. There all shall be common partakers of the blessed fruit of the Tree of Life, of old denied to Adam for his sin. It is written, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life which is in the midst of the Paradise of GOD."¹ Thus shall all the members of the ransomed kingdom advance, not indeed with equal steps, but according to the capacities and gifts of each, towards a "perfect man, towards the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST."

¹ Rev. ii. 7.

Imperfection of their State.

For in no sense are we to think of them as having attained a condition of perfection. When the Apostle speaks of the departed as "just men perfected,"¹ it is evident that he uses the term merely relatively. Absolutely perfect, i.e., corresponding to their ideal, and a complete realisation of that, none of them is. They are perfect neither in knowledge nor in happiness, neither in their intellectual completeness, nor in their bodily organisation. They feel a throb of the universal sorrow with which creation groans and travails, and which shall continue until the Resurrection, and the redemption of the body.² They cannot forget that many of their brethren are still engaged in a hard fight of afflictions, and are in daily peril of falling into sin, and of being cut off for ever from the LORD. It may be, some of their nearest and dearest shall never attain to their re-

¹ Heb. xii. 23.

² Rom. viii. 22, 23.

pose,—never more join their company into the ages of the ages ! Their own life too, though in many respects so beautiful, is incomplete ; it is still *hid* with CHRIST in GOD ; and not until CHRIST shall appear in His glory at the end of all things shall it be fully manifested.¹ A state of waiting cannot be a state of perfection,—and the redeemed are waiting. They are not to be thought of as in Heaven where the central Glory dwells. To that Heaven, said JESUS, no mere man has ever ascended.² Nor, as far as we know, ever shall ; for the future Heaven of the redeemed, the New Jerusalem, is represented as coming down from Heaven to the earth then ransomed and renewed.³ The LORD alone, in virtue of His Divine Nature, has passed into the Heavens.⁴ There He will remain until the restitution of all things.⁵ Then behold He cometh with clouds.⁶ With power and great

¹ Col. iii. 4.

² Rom. viii. 21 ; Rev. xxi. 2.

³ Acts iii. 21.

⁴ S. John iii. 13.

⁵ S. John xx. 17.

⁶ Rev. i. 7.

glory shall He come.¹ He shall send His Angels to gather His Elect.² Summoned from Paradise, those who have slept in Him shall attend Him. Accompanied by the thousands of His Saints, the LORD Himself shall then descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of GOD.³ Then at the voice of the Son of Man, the bodies of the dead shall rise incorruptible and glorious.⁴ Arrayed in these beauteous spirit-bodies, perfect alike in form and in substance, the redeemed from among men will be invited to share the glories of "the new Heavens and the new earth," of the "holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from GOD, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."⁵ "Then cometh the end, when the SON shall have delivered up the kingdom to GOD, even the FATHER."⁶ And

¹ S. Matth. xxiv. 30.

² S. Matth. xxiv. 31.

³ 1 Thess. iv. 14, 16; S. Jude 14.

⁴ S. John v. 28; 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43.

⁵ Rev. xxi. 1, 2.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 24.

thenceforth the "tabernacle of GOD shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and GOD Himself shall be with them, and be their GOD. And GOD shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."¹

For this inconceivably-glorious consummation, when he that has overcome shall inherit all things, and enter upon the noble destinies prepared for him, the spirit of the Saint in Paradise is waiting, and ever until then, his happiness must be incomplete, and his condition imperfect. Ever until then the Church on earth, as she gives thanks for each soul departed in CHRIST'S faith and fear, will add her prayer "that it would please Him of His gracious goodness shortly to accomplish the number of His elect, and to hasten His kingdom ; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of His

¹ Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in His eternal and everlasting glory.”¹

**General view of the Condition of the
Dead in Christ. Objects of their
Sojourn in Paradise.**

How then shall we picture to ourselves the present life of those our beloved who have died in the LORD? We are to think of them as dwelling, attired in temporary bodily vestments of a refined and celestial texture, in a place called Paradise, a fair and pleasant country, where they are with CHRIST and see His glory.² The Psalmist asked of old, “Shall Thy loving-kindness be showed in the grave? dost Thou show wonders among the dead?”³ Yes, (by the light of the later Revelation we can reply,) He continues to show His loving-kindness,

¹ Burial Service, Prayer Book.

² S. John xvii. 24.

³ Ps. lxxxviii. 10.

to show His wonders there,—even the treasures of knowledge and of wisdom which are stored in CHRIST. There, freed from arduous labours and painful conflicts, the holy dead rest on the bosom of their LORD, not indeed in sloth, but in intense activity of mind, thinking of their past lives, and learning to understand them, and preparing for the higher destinies which await them. Their occupation there is their improvement in the development of their moral and spiritual nature, the deepening of their self-knowledge, the perfecting of their repentance, whereby they are prepared to pass the dread tribunal of the future Judgment. Further, their preparation for the duties and the glories of Heaven through the expansion of their intellectual views of GOD'S truth, and the complete subordination of their wills to GOD, together with vast increase of love to man,—in a word, their sanctification and perfecting in soul and spirit. And these objects are attained by recollection, reflection, and contemplation, and

by intercourse with CHRIST and with each other, under the constant guidance and direction of the eternal Spirit of Wisdom and of Love.

Thus much, then, have we gathered from Scripture, and chiefly from the words of JESUS and His Apostles, concerning the life of the departed. Nor will any one who has known bereavement consider time ill-spent which has been devoted to so holy a contemplation. For a little we have endeavoured to raise our thoughts to those serene and sainted ones, once so well known here, ever to be deeply mourned, until we too shall join their company. We have dwelt with them in spirit, and held converse with "their solemn troops and sweet societies." We have seen that they lead a calm and hallowed life, very noble, elevated, and pure.

"We know they live in GOD, and there
We find them worthier to be loved."

May somewhat of the light in which they dwell shine forth on us! Be it ours to

live as those who have lifted the veil of Paradise, and cast a sad and wistful look upon the sainted dead ! Be it ours to live like them who through faith and patience have inherited that blest repose, and gained admittance into the antechamber of the glorious King ! We have seen that the special feature of their life is this,—that it is a life in CHRIST, a life with CHRIST, a life for CHRIST.

“The Lamb is all the glory,
In Emmanuel’s Land.”

There is no other Name in all that glad and peaceful kingdom. Let us then prepare for entrance there by learning to know and love JESUS now. If we own ourselves His and determine to follow Him here, we shall find that He will not desert us yonder. “He that liveth and believeth in Him shall never die.” “My sheep shall never perish ; none shall pluck them out of My hand.” In the shock of death, in the ruin of the body, the soul shall be perfectly safe which has trusted in CHRIST, and followed Him as his

Shepherd. But ah, what hope for him who, having heard the Name of JESUS, has yet neglected the only SAVIOUR?

Possibility of attaining the Rest of Paradise.

Through trust in Him Who hath "opened unto us the gate of everlasting life," it is possible when we die to be fit to enter Paradise. To us sinners Heaven appears unattainable. A condition of perfection, of absolute holiness, a life in the immediate presence of GOD, alas, how few can dream that they will be ready when they quit the body to enter upon an existence such as that! Hence many, ignorant of the intermediate life of preparation, supposing Scripture to teach that those passing away unfit for Heaven shall be doomed to Hell, view religion with despair, and are already inclined to accept, as valid against GOD'S revealed Truth, the first objections of the sceptic

that may come in their way. It is hoped, accordingly, that the foregoing exposition of Scripture-teaching regarding the intermediate state may tend to the encouragement of souls which CHRIST has purchased with His Blood. Reflection on the subject will naturally lead to the following conclusions :—

“Assuredly, I am not fit for Heaven, nor can I expect to be when I die,—yet I may hope to be ready for Paradise. The thief on the cross was considered ready for it by Him Who is its King. Verily I say unto thee, said JESUS to him, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise. Surely there is no reason why I should not by GOD’S grace be at least equally prepared.” An inference, as sound as it is encouraging ; nor is there indeed any passage in the Bible more fraught with comfort for one who, apprehending the ideal of Christian manhood, feels deeply the difficulty, I had almost said the impossibility, of perfectly attaining it in the midst of that busy life which here the

best of men are called to lead. Only let us guard against misapprehension in a matter of such tremendous importance. What, let us consider well, was the actual state of mind in virtue of which CHRIST pronounced the penitent thief fit for Paradise? We are told that the man acknowledged the justness of his sentence, "we (suffer) indeed justly, he said to his fellow-criminal, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Further, he had grace to see the true, the royal, the Divine character of the Man Who was dying at his side. He saw, what apparently many better educated persons do not see, that He Who was hanging there must either be an impostor, or was really (what He said He was) the SON of GOD, and King of Israel. He felt the latter to be the truth. So he submitted to this King, and sued for mercy, "LORD, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom." For him the dying SAVIOUR at once unlocks the gates of His realm of rest, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

Can we doubt that the same JESUS will open to us the gate of Paradise, which we have closed against ourselves by our sins, if, like this man who died on the cross beside Him, we do truly repent us of our sins and look to Him as our SAVIOUR, submitting ourselves to Him as our King? We cannot doubt it, for He died on purpose that we should be with Him there and behold His glory; and He has promised, "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." May He give us grace to turn to Him with our whole hearts, and henceforth to live in His service,—to endure unto the end, to be faithful unto death. Then shall we too when our change comes, be borne by Angels to that calm land of rest, there to join the blessed company of all His servants departed this life in His faith and fear,—there with them to await the dawning of the Morning of Resurrection.

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